We Are Born Into A Racist Society

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In this essay I want to pick up on a biological discussion I have taken part in before. This will involve talking about race and class, about the intersectional nature of forms of oppression, and about classification and hierarchicalisation of people as a result of human activity. The major problem here, I intend to suggest, is that people want to create hierarchies at all and to compare people in terms of better and worse or favoured and disfavoured or insider and outsider or “like me” and “not like me”. This is primarily a political activity as far as I can see (regardless of if things like ethics or religion are utilised within it) and its consequences are usually political as well. In engaging with such subjects I do not intend to get too much into the detail of real world oppressions, however. This is not because I am blind to them or find them unimportant but because I do not feel especially qualified to do so. I am someone who believes that people should speak for themselves, as far as they can, and so I do not believe in speaking on behalf of other people. Contemporaneous accounts of real world oppressions are numerous and constantly being produced and I suggest readers seek them out if this is what they want for they are not hard to find and many of them speak powerfully about real world oppressions people suffer from in an ongoing way. The voices of those affected by these will speak much more powerfully for themselves than I ever could on their behalf. It is for this reason, therefore, that I intend to speak more generally and overarchingly, through the medium of an historical account, whilst still, I hope, saying things that cut some ice with the experiences of real people in the contemporary world today.

As a means to discussing hierarchical thinking I want to address the subject of white racism (and classism) which, in the twentieth century, becomes the story of eugenics. Hidden within these movements are any number of hierarchical thoughts and a

methodological preference for classifying people into groups thought real and empirical but actually nothing more than rhetorical and political. This story is told superbly well by Robert Sussman in his book *The Myth of Race* and what follows can all be found more fully fleshed out, and with much more detail, in this book. This is a story of racists and classists (and often ones acting on behalf of, and endorsed by, scientific figures) and, in summarising their story, following Sussman's lead, I want to expose hierarchical thinking by giving clear examples of it in the history of white racism and eugenics. My purpose in this essay, then, is to show how this thinking has occurred in history and to draw some conclusions about it, as a result, which show how classification and hierarchy are tools of power and domination (and so, consequently, things we should always refuse).

Robert Sussman's book *The Myth of Race* is a mightily disturbing book. Its first four chapters tell an alarmingly circular story of eugenics and racism that runs from the Spanish Inquisition, beginning in the late fifteenth century, to the horrors of Nazi Germany in the middle of the twentieth. You might think, at first, that these examples are extreme and, therefore, comfortingly rare. The problem is, however, as Sussman shows in these first four chapters, that they are only the logical outcome and endpoint of certain points of view that are distressingly resilient in the minds of white Europeans and their descendants. (Compare, for example, the present beliefs of prominent businessman Peter Thiel or the rantings of tinpot demagogues like Trump, Orban and Farage.) In such light they stand out not as comfortingly rare but as something that is bound to happen again if the thought that sustains and motivates such genocides is allowed to carry on, unchecked, for too long.

All this is despite the fact that, as Sussman repeats multiple times, *the idea of biological races of human beings is an evidenceless nonsense. Race, where it exists at all, is a cultural*

and not a biological phenomenon. Indeed, the first sentence Robert Sussman writes in his book is that, "In 1950, UNESCO issued a statement asserting that all humans belong to the same species and that 'race' is not a biological reality but a myth." And so, "this scientific fact," he continues, "is as valid and true as the fact that the earth is round and revolves around the sun." This seems pretty definitive. But we are only in the introductory chapter of Sussman's book and soon, leafing through pages littered with philosophical and scientific luminaries of their day, we will have cause to wonder how seriously we should take such people and such disciplines if people of the views they espoused can dwell within their elite, academic ranks. So the issue is we have a problem and that problem is (elite-fuelled) racism. If you are now asking how people can be racist if there are no biological races of human beings then you hit on this issue. Clearly, people look different. And it is from this that the sociological phenomenon of racism begins. Sussman lays out this problem concisely:

"*Racism is a part of our everyday lives. Where you live, where you go to school, your job, your profession, who you interact with, how people interact with you, your treatment in the healthcare and justice systems are all affected by your race. For the past 500 years people have been taught how to interpret and understand racism. We have been told that there are very specific things that relate to race, such as intelligence, sexual behavior, birth rates, infant care, work ethics and abilities, personal restraint, life span, law-abidingness, aggression, altruism, economic and business practices, family cohesion, and even brain size. We have learned that races are structured in a hierarchical order and that some races are better than others. Even if you are not a racist, your life is affected by this ordered structure. We are born into a racist society.*"

We see this racist society when people, and let's not be shy, they are WHITE people more often than not, complain about "multiculturalism" (as out-going US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, did in a tweet shortly before the inauguration of President Biden) or when people (yes, white people again mostly) complain about differently coloured immigrants or when people build gates and walls around their community to keep the poors out. All of these phenomena are phenomena in which one group of people - privileged whites - feel themselves to be absolutely different in kind from some other group of people and so they fear their "threat" or wish to be segregated from them. As we will soon see, these are all impulses that come from a racist, eugenic frame of mind - and that even though "Anthropologists have shown for many years now that there is no biological reality to human race". In addition:

"*There are no major complex behaviors that directly correlate with what might be considered human 'racial' characteristics. There is no inherent relationship between intelligence, law-abidingness, or economic practices and race, just as there is no relationship between nose size, height, blood group, or skin color and any set of complex human behaviors.*"

Racism based on any racial notion of biology is, then, as far as the human beings best placed to investigate it are concerned, entirely bogus. And where it is repeated it is a lie, a falsehood.

If only that were good enough but, by now, we must surely realise that something being merely true isn't nearly good enough in this world. And so:

"*over the past 500 years, we have been taught by an informal, mutually reinforcing consortium of intellectuals, politicians, statesmen, business and economic leaders, and their books that human racial biology is real and that certain races are biologically better than others. These teachings have led to major injustices to Jews and non-Christians during the Spanish Inquisition; to blacks, Native Americans, and others during colonial times; to African Americans during slavery and reconstruction; to Jews and other Europeans during the reign of the Nazis in Germany; and to groups from Latin America and the Middle East, among others, during modern political times.*"

People keep insisting that they are so different from some other kinds of people, and different in definitive, empirical ways that make a difference, that they need to take action against them, sometimes deadly drastic action, sometimes merely action which, in some way, discriminates against them.

The Spanish Inquisition, first established in 1478, was one such occasion and its where Sussman formally begins his account. It began by targeting Jews and it wanted to keep them out of the mainstream of Spanish society. Later it targeted "Christianised Muslims and Gypsies" and, when Spain grew interested in imperial conquest, others in Asia and the Americas felt the consequences of their activist separatism and racism too. It is even reported that the Spanish zeal for action against those classified in certain ways brought their ire to the doors of "Protestants, homosexuals, people accused of witchcraft, freethinkers, public intellectuals, and people considered to be quirky or 'gadflies'" as well. Altogether, these various inquisitions, which introduced a concept of "impurity of blood" as a classificatory measure, "discriminated against and separated one group from another without allowing any legal means for the discriminated group to assimilate." The Spanish did not want identified types of people mixing with, and in the mainstream of, Spanish

society. They wanted these classified and identified types separated, segregated, isolated - perhaps even exterminated as in the case of people they met on their colonial travels. This was carried out by those in and with political power and so was political action. The state was here deciding how to classify people and what would become of them as a consequence as an aspect of the use of their power to dominate.

One might wonder how they could have done this. Most actions, particularly public state actions such as these, normally need some kind of rationalization, however inadequate it may seem to others, in order to justify actions carried out. Sussman informs us that around 500 years ago there were two basic forms of rationalization which are what we would now describe as racist thought. The first, called the “pre-Adamite” theory (thought at this time was, due to Christian penetration in the societies of Western Europe, required to interact with the Bible), regarded those such as natives of what Europeans would label “the Americas” as people who did not have a place in the descendancy of peoples as described in Genesis. So they were literally “pre-Adamite” people. This effectively made such people subhuman, outside of God’s salvation history even where that included despised peoples that were included in the Bible. Spanish Conquistadors deemed such people “incapable of morality and unable to become Christian” and that was enough to kill them and take what they had. The second theory, by the way, the degenerate theory, was that these people were included in the biblical peoples but they had some how wandered off and become “degenerates” and so unacceptable in the sight of those who weren't. Either way, justification was found for death and theft on a grand scale by designating an “other” to dominate.

Throughout the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries others, such as the British and the French and those white Europeans who settled what would become the USA, took up

similar ideas and points of view. Land could be taken, resources hoarded and people attacked, enslaved and dispossessed because they were regarded as, in some sense, not worthy of the things, including the lives, that they had. Such ideas, and the practices they enabled, would become the basis of racist thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here the “pre-Adamite” (in relation to things biblical) or “polygenic” (meaning a theory that these despised people were of a different biological kind to their oppressors) theory would become the dominant one, particularly as the authority of the Bible declined in Western society generally. However, in the earlier part of this period it was the other, degenerate, theory which held sway as it was more compatible with the Bible since it assumed that God had created all people just as the Bible said. However, since all the despised people were thought to be degenerate it was for the “rational, moral men” (i.e. white European Christians) to control them accordingly.

In the degenerate theory we begin to see fragments of hierarchical thinking and some acrobatic mental attempts to justify or “explain” it. The English philosopher, John Locke, was an adherent of the degenerate theory. He justified taking things away from native peoples, as one of the architects of English colonialism, on the basis that “they had unjustly opposed the Europeans” and what he saw as their “personal failures” which annulled any biblical ascription of equal rights or equality in the biblical creation. (Here “failure” basically means judging other people by the standard of white, European civilisation.) The French philosopher and politician, Montesquieu, developed an elaborate, climate and geography-based scheme in which he attempted to explain why non-European peoples had degenerated - and climatic or geographical reasons for perceived differences in human beings would become quite popular with some European thinkers. Another, Carl Linnaeus, the Swede who thought he was classifying God’s creation in his newly developed scheme of zoological classification (on which biology is still based

today), conceived of a creationist fixed order of things brought to life immediately by God. It was, thus, hierarchically arranged by God in a “Great Chain of Being”, as it was referred to. It was Linnaeus who referred to human beings as “Homo Sapiens” yet he also classified human beings “in relationship to their supposed education and climatic situation”, thinking that this might make a difference to their classification. Naturally (if one is a white European) white Europeans were seen as the pinnacle of humanity in this scheme.

A disciple of Linnaeus was the German physician and anatomist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. He is today regarded as one of the first physical anthropologists. Blumenbach believed there was one human species but that it exhibited global variation. Yet he still managed to describe five varieties (that is, classifications) of human beings based on geographical locations. These were: Caucasian, Mongoloid, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Unfortunately, along with these “descriptors” came some annoyingly resilient ideas. One was calling those of European descent “Caucasian” – and regarding them as the ideal, “the closest to God’s image”, and the “original” humans and “most beautiful”. It was from these that the others had “degenerated”. Blumenbach said all this on no scientific basis, however. It was all simple aesthetics and his appreciation of aesthetics.

Secondly, Blumenbach, although he saw one continuum of humanity, “accepted the underlying paradigm of the day, as had Linnaeus... that one variety was indeed better and preferable to another in relationship to God’s original creation.” Indeed, Blumenbach’s classification of human beings wasn’t only geographical: it was hierarchical. In this classificatory scheme, “Caucasian” was an “ideal” and some, as with the historian of science, Stephen Jay Gould, see this as something that became a foundational moment in “the creation of the modern racists’ paradigm”. As Gould interprets this analysis, “The

shift from a geographic to a hierarchical ordering of human diversity marks a fateful transition in the history of Western science. (Blumenbach's) five race scheme became canonical, and he changed the geometry of human order from Linnaean cartography to linear ranking by putative worth."

Under the surface here are various ideas that we must keep in mind. People, obviously, observed differences (not least in skin colour) between different types of people. Yet many accepted, on religious grounds which they may then have sought to justify through explanations of their observances and experiences, that people were made by God and were fixed as they were (perhaps unalterably so(by him. This is one reason why various geographical or climatic theories were attempted to explain unavoidable observed differences whilst having the Bible (and other thought that could not be doubted) remain in place. One particular idea here was in regard to one's environment and whether this could have an effect upon one's natural endowments or not. This would become increasingly important as evolution became a powerful idea in such discussions (and we must keep in mind that, at this stage, the vast majority were creationists). There were, at this time, however, those who believed that taking "lesser peoples" to a different place and educating them would inevitably alter their situation in life. But there were yet others who believed that you were what you were and *nothing* could change that.

But back to the polygenic theory which had trouble in more bibliophilic times as it seemed to directly contradict the biblical account of creation. Indeed, early polygenists risked being burned to death by the Church themselves, so contradictory to biblical verities did such ideas seem. The problem (for the Church), however, was that polygenic explanations of the findings of biologists and anthropologists kept being regarded as the best ones. But this also came with racist implications and, in the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, polygenic theories would form the basis of “a powerful ‘scientific’ defense of racist ideology.” Noted eighteenth century polygenists included those pillars of the Enlightenment, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, two solidly canonical Western philosophers. (One might compare their reception within modern European philosophy as opposed to that of Martin Heidegger, the latter tainted by association with Nazi Germany although, arguably, his actual views offend the nostrils no more than those of these philosophical forebears.) Hume, states Robert Sussman, “advocated the separate creation and innate inferiority of nonwhite peoples” and, indeed, in his own words he described black people as “naturally inferior to whites” in a screed which basically preaches the supremacy of white civilisation.

Kant, on the other hand, “essentially created a racist anthropology based on skin color”, remarkable for a philosopher still thought of in the Western canon as perhaps the most important moral theorist of all. He believed that “Climate determined the natural predispositions or character of each race, and once the process toward each racial disposition had begun, it was irreversible.” So Kant thought the white European’s superiority was baked in on the basis of such views - and that the inferiority of the rest was equally set and unchangeable. Therefore, “Although Kant was a champion of the equality of all men and of civil rights, these were only for humans who have the ability to educate themselves and thus have free will — they were only for whites. Full personhood was actually dependent upon one’s race.” And so, “Nonwhites were relegated to a lower rung in the moral ladder.” We can hear strong echoes of this in, for example, the treatment of slaves by Europeans. Regarded as different in kind, and in some sense untrainable and unreformable, they were condemned to perform menial tasks under the control of “morally superior” white masters - or to die if they would not.

It seems to me that Kant's stated beliefs are as disreputable as any that Heidegger ever uttered and so one must wonder at what about Kant redeems him in the eyes of those who still regard him so highly where Heidegger is considered by many so beyond the pail. Perhaps these academics just don't know of Kant's views which, pertinently, also extended to the "nonpersonhood of Jews")? At least one anthropologist, Nina Jablonski, has recently described Kant as "one of the most influential racists of all time". Someone please let the philosophers know what one of their clan, Charles W. Mills, then has this to say about Kant:

"*The embarrassing fact for the white West (which doubtless explains its concealment) is that their most important moral theorist of the past three hundred years is also the foundational theorist in the modern period of the division between Herrenvolk and Untermenschen, persons and subpersons, upon which Nazi theory would later draw. Modern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father.*"

This is, and should be, profoundly embarrassing but it nevertheless describes the basis of much subsequently racist thought in which the white person is privileged and the non-white person is not on a classificatory basis intended to establish domination by some people over others. And, at the stage of Kant, it really only was a classification based on skin colour for, as yet, no other kinds of research had even been undertaken. It was base prejudice raised to the level of philosophy and science. Such work would be done though, motivated by racist ideology, in an attempt to give such racism scientific credentials which bolstered the dominating behaviour's theoretical standing. For example, Samuel Morton and his Mortonite disciples, George Gliddon, Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz, would attempt to argue that cranial measurements and features argued for the polygenic or pre-Adamite theory. All of these researchers "forwarded the cause of slavery and racism".

This research took place in the recently created USA which, through the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, would become a hub of white racist and eugenicist theory and political machinations. Here "science" was often carried out by wealthy and well connected men of prejudice who wanted to find scientifically acceptable (or at least rhetorically arguable) reasons for their prejudice in order to persuade pliable politicians to enact political policy to make such dubious beliefs physically experienced and dominant realities. One of the men here, Josiah Nott, would give "lectures on Niggerology" and claimed they made him all the more popular as a result, both before and after the American Civil War. Another, Agassiz, was an anti-Darwinian who "regarded human beings as the object and end of divine creation and assumed that the world and its contents had been put there specifically to be exploited for human use." Upon seeing his first black person, having emigrated to the USA from an entirely white earlier life in Europe, Agassiz wrote to his mother "describing his repulsion at seeing someone so different from himself." Such views motivated research from the Mortonites to the end that blacks were not even of the same species as whites in a typically polygenic view of human beings. Archetypally, the views of the Mortonites can be found in the book *Types of Mankind*, authored by Nott and Gliddon in 1854 but which was popular into the twentieth century, going through multiple reprintings. It existed in order to show that science, the human activity of objective classification, justified slavery.

Meanwhile, the European counterpart to the Mortonites was Frenchman, Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau. His book, *Essai sur I'Inégalité des Races Humaines*, translated into English in an abridged version by the Mortonite, Josiah Nott, as "The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races", proved even more popular than *Types of Mankind* in both Europe and America. Sussman even suggests this book played a role in Hitler's racial philosophy and politics. Gobineau himself was a fake Count ("comte" was not a title but

simply the name he took) and probably the most successful academic racist of the nineteenth century. The works of the Mortonites and Gobineau together would directly inspire the work of twentieth century racists in Europe and America and ultimately lead to Nazism. Gobineau relied on the "Nordic myth" which we now know as a core part of the Nazi racial philosophy. Yet its important for we moderns to know that this, like much of Nazism, didn't just spring from Hitler's mind one day. The theory itself has history. As Sussman explains, "In this myth, the noble classes of Europe were thought to be originally German Franks and Anglo-Saxons, and the Germanic peoples were claimed as most superior."

This shifted formerly theologically justified claims of superiority into becoming biological claims and such racial theories were essentially class-based as well, rooted, as they were, in class conflicts of the time in Europe. Therefore, they also "carried the invidious notion that each class had distinct and unalterable hereditary qualities derived from separate origins. The weaker classes were naturally inferior to the stronger and owed obedience to them." As Sussman continues:

"*Through these writings, there was a popular belief in France that three racial strains inhabited the country: Nordics, Alpines, and Mediterraneans. The light-skinned, tall, blond Nordics were assumed to be the descendants of ancient Germanic tribes, the originators of all civilization, and the only peoples capable of leadership. Gobineau's Essai expressed these popular myths vividly and inserted these views into the popular science of the day. His book fed a developing idea that not only were whites superior over all others but also that a certain group among whites was even more superior to other whites. He used the term Aryan, coined by a British colonial administrator, to designate the common ancestral language of what is now referred to as the Indo-European language. Around 1819, the term*

began to gain widespread authority due to the lectures and writings of Friedrich Schlegel, a German poet and scholar. The most influential promoter of the Aryan myth was Jacob Grimm, of Brothers Grimm's fairytales fame, in his History of the English Language (1848), which reached a large public audience in the second half of the nineteenth century."

So we can see that, prior to the twentieth century, in both Europe and America, there were both scientific and non-scientific works which attempted to justify, with some success, racist theories of the human species. Gobineau, in particular, with his eulogisation of the Aryan theory and his proclamation "that the success of civilization [is] directly dependent upon the purity of 'Aryan' blood within it", laid foundations that others would later be able to exploit. But we must remember that all such thought, even by its very existence, has the opportunity to fester in the background and become the basis of further illegitimate thought and action if some appropriately motivated minds find themselves seized by it. (Hence the modern danger of "conspiracy theories" which can reek havoc if the wrong people become seized by them.) In the post-Civil War United States, in which racial tensions were far from solved, the notion of "racial purity" and the dangers of "interbreeding" would continue to be public themes on into the twentieth century, for example. All this is despite the fact that neither Gobineau, nor Kant before him, had ever done any original research of their own. It was all free form theorising, the narrativisation of lived prejudice. In truth, they formed the backbone of a shift from "biblically-based" racisms into biologically argued ones that became increasingly justified on the basis of a classificatory "science" that aimed to dominate through claims to knowledge. (Michel Foucault uses this idea as the basis for many of his books.)

In a way very similar to this, an argument from a flawed understanding of biology and its classifications is what sustains the current "gender critical" movement in the matter of

human gender. Such arguments were also very prevalent, however, in white European racism from the Spanish Inquisition to the horrors of the Nazis as well. As Sussman explains:

"*Thus, with Gobineau and again in the footsteps of Kant, subtle but major changes could take place in this school of racism, moving beyond biblical interpretations and more into 'hereditary' ones. Biological determinists could claim biological separation among human races (and other groupings of humans, such as strains and even economic classes) using 'blood' or heredity and not necessarily invoking biblical separation. They could use the same 'biological' arguments to claim that racial and group distinctions were biologically fixed and unchangeable. Thus, racism could become more acceptable to biblical traditionalists, giving biological deterministic racism a more widespread following and making it compatible with the growth of Darwinism and genetic theory. You might think of Mortonism as the end of an old Bible- (or anti-Bible-) based polygenics and Gobinism (in a Kantian tradition) as a revision of a 'blood' or hereditary-based racism that was potentially compatible with Darwinism. The different races of mankind need not have been created separately as explained, or not, by the Bible. They merely needed to be genetically distinct and thus different in their basic biology. In both cases, these biological distinctions were basically fixed, and admixture would lead to inferiority, weakness, and even increased mortality. Little or nothing could be changed by environmental influences.*"

By the end of the nineteenth century the "degenerate" theory had, then, basically died out and the polygenic theory would be the one that would go forward in an attempt to biologically ground the essential difference and (to the polygenists, at least) necessary separation and classification of "biological" races much as "gender critical" critics (almost none of whom are actual biologists) attempt to fix the sexes, and an appreciation of

genders, today. We may see the turn of the twentieth century as the beginning of the era of eugenic thinking that builds on all this that had gone before. It was also the era in which political policy, prosecuted on the basis of eugenic apologia, began. The wellspring for such action was the USA and was based on thought about biology and genetics and a debunking of those – such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a Frenchman who, in the early nineteenth century, had argued for a theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics based on environmental factors – who argued that different environments could produce different abilities in people – who were, thus, not lost causes because they happened to have been born somewhere unfavourable to the appearance of one skill or another.

The focus now became heredity and locked in characteristics which couldn't be changed. For such people you simply were your biology and your genetics, hostages to biological fortune, people different in kind on the basis of biological race. Environment, for such people, could not change this and so, as one person in 1891 expressed this, "education has no value for the future of mankind" which could now not be "improved" in general. Eugenicists were, then, biological determinists just as the "gender critical" are today. The old polygenists (or pre-Adamites) and the new eugenicists had strong ties. At the beginning of the twentieth century *Types of Mankind* and Gobineau's *Essai* were still popular books on both sides of the North Atlantic and Nott and Gobineau themselves were influential characters. Later figures championed their ideas as well. A concatenation of wealthy, industrialist and scientific figures found common cause in the new, eugenic thinking and it wormed its way into higher American society through books such as William Z. Ripley's *The Races of Europe*, Ernst Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe: At the Close of the Nineteenth Century* and Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*.

A notable figure at this time was Nathaniel Shaler, a Harvard professor of paleontology who was brought to Harvard by Agassiz and who published *Nature and Man in America* in 1891. Shaler was racist in the style of Gobineau and influenced by the Aryan myth. He was himself from a wealthy family with ties to the slave trade (he was born in 1841 when this was still very legal). Shaler's racism tied Gobineau's mythological racism to Nott's pseudo-scientific variety as well, however, to create a view which regarded people of colour as little more than barbarians and Europe as the cradle of civilization and all that was good in human beings. (Modern anthropology, of course, places any genuine "cradle of civilisation" very much in Africa. See, for example, the work of the Radical Anthropology affiliated anthropologists.) Shaler, however, stated that "The Americas, Africa and Australia have shown by their human products that they are unfitted to be the cradle-places of great peoples...These continents have never from their own blood built a race that has risen above barbarism." Consequently, Shaler disdained race mixing and saw it as something which would doom all races together. All such thinking was baby steps on the road to what would, one day, become the concept of a "master race". Shaler's importance is that he was teaching this kind of thing habitually to thousands of Harvard graduates and he, without doubt, helped bring such thought into the American twentieth century. As two examples of this, three of his students would go on to form the "Immigration Restriction League" and future US president, Theodore Roosevelt, was taught personally by Shaler at Harvard.

We see in the words of another Shaler student, Charles Davenport, speaking in the late 1920s, where Shaler's fixation with racial intermingling could lead:

"*Those who look to the future are naturally concerned with the question: 'What is to be the consequence of this racial intermingling?' Especially we of the white race, proud of its*

achievement in the past, are eagerly questioning the consequences of mixing our blood with that of other races who have made less advancement in science and the arts... one of the results of hybridization between whites and Negroes — the production of an excessive number of ineffective, because disharmoniously put together people... It is, however, this burden of ineffectiveness which is the heavy price that is paid for hybridization. A population of hybrids will be a population carrying an excessively large number of intellectually incompetent persons."

It is not too hard to think of others in the late 1920s, in countries other than the United States, who had their own concerns about the mixing of various peoples. Indeed, Robert Sussman states in so many words in *The Myth of Race* that "Davenport and his followers in the eugenics movement brought biological determinism, racial prejudice, and the active agenda of eugenics right up to the Nazi regime of Hitler." In fact, he goes further, stating that "it was the 'science' of eugenics and strict biological determinism that formed the backbone of Nazism." That it could be propagated as "science", furthermore, and so have the sheen and authority of some kind of academic classificatory acceptability, was not the least of the reasons why it penetrated so deeply into the life of the world in general. It is a stark warning that neither "science" nor being a high falutin academic are barriers to dangerous theories with socially and politically horrific consequences.

Eugenics itself is an outgrowth of something known as "social Darwinism". Darwin, over whom I have passed in this overview of racism and eugenic thinking, of course fits squarely into the time period I am discussing but he did not himself use his evolutionary theories of natural selection for explicitly racist purposes even if others did attempt to use Darwin as a way to explain their own racism. Social Darwinism, for example, was a belief system "that espoused that the strongest or fittest should survive and flourish in

society, while the weak and unfit should be allowed to die." It is, as you might expect, an elitist theory that can also be boiled down to "might is right". Applied to society, its not hard to see how this might be a theory held to by wealthy elites or historical nobility to justify their continued existence at the imagined top of an evolutionary pyramid. Darwin's theories were twisted here to justify why the people "at the top" were at the top - and it was basically because they deserved it because they were better people biologically. Yet, at the same time, the poverty of other kinds of people was also explained away and excused because such people were imagined to be prey to their own, inevitable "weaker" biology. Thus, "To Social Darwinists, not only was survival of the fittest natural, it was also morally correct. In fact, many argued that it was morally wrong to assist the weak since that would be promoting the survival and reproduction of the less fit." The social Darwinist imagined this "battle" taking place not only between different races or ethnicities but also between different classes as well.

Eugenics ramped up social Darwinism into a political activism. Eugenicists wanted to actually see its thought, and the policies developed from it, brought to bear upon the population such that the population itself would be affected, shaped and dominated by such thinking. This ambition existed long before Hitler gave such thinking its most obvious practical expression in Nazi Germany and, as stated, the major motor here was thought and subsequent action in the USA in any case. But it was not an American who may be credited as the father of eugenics, however, but a Briton, Francis Galton (incidentally, a cousin of Charles Darwin). Galton acquired independent wealth during his lifetime and so was free to study at will. He first coined the term "eugenics" in 1883 and "believed that controlled breeding of humans was not only doable but a highly desirable goal". This was where eugenics began, in a desire to breed "better" humans and breed out "worse" examples of the species. It is not then inconsequential that "He believed that the

average ‘negro’ intellectual standard was two grades below that of extant ‘Anglo-Saxons,’ and he saw the intellectual standard of the latter as two grades below that of residents of ancient Greece”. He also wanted to promote what he called “judicious mating” and to “cultivate race” more generally. Master race here we come!

There was an early split among eugenicists into “positive” and “negative” types - although neither seem particularly savoury. The former, which is mainly what Galton was, “called for the control of human breeding to produce genetically superior people” (echoes of the “master race” here) while the latter “lobbied for improving the quality of the human race by eliminating or excluding biologically inferior people from the population through the use of segregation, deportation, castration, marriage prohibition, compulsory sterilization, passive euthanasia, and, ultimately, extermination” which is a description which sounds like something out of a history lesson for people in the twenty first century. Sussman tells us that Galton’s approach was more British whereas the negative kind of eugenics was more American. Galton assumed all kinds of traits (“character and personality, general intellectual ability, gregariousness, longevity, strong sexual passion, aversion to meat, craving for drink and gambling, susceptibility to opium, proclivity to pauperism and crimes of violence and fraud, madness, and tuberculosis”) were heritable and his thinking marked the turn towards a biologically-argued authoritarianism. In 1904 Galton endowed a research position at University College London in eugenics and in Germany in 1905 the Society of Race Hygiene was founded... shortly followed thereafter by the British Eugenics Education Society, once more in London. Eugenics attracted prominent supporters in the UK “including liberal economist William Beveridge; conservative politician Arthur Balfour; authors George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Sidney Webb; and future prime minister Winston Churchill.” Notable in Britain, however, was that at this time it was focused more on class than race specifically.

But let us now focus briefly on the “negative” eugenics as it developed in the USA. As context, we cannot avoid noting that America was essentially a country built on racism which had utilised slavery from its beginning and had necessitated the genocide of the native populations in order to exist in the first place. We have already noted some of the arguments used to justify such activities above. Consequently, however, there was a strong sense of racial identity running through the white population which might be reflected in Sussman’s suggestion that “the eugenics movement was much more negative and pernicious even in its early development” in the United States. The USA had a large African American population and was also increasingly a magnet for immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This proved a breeding ground among elite whites including “academics and those with economic, social, and political power” who “began to endorse biologically deterministic theories of human behavior” and who “believed that much of human behavior was biologically determined”. Of course, it wasn’t elite white behaviour they looked to critique. Race and class prejudices decided what was in need of explanation, classification and control. So the American eugenicists, in some cases, were more than happy to believe that “drunkenness, insanity, prostitution, and criminality could be hereditary” and looked to bring eugenics thinking to bear on such social problems as well as more overtly racial ones. Such thinking got as crazy as imagining that “criminals could be identified by physical characteristics (including such features as a sloping forehead, ears of unusual size, asymmetry of the face or cranium, and excessive arm length)”.

Such thought developed in the direction of diagnosing “mental deficiency” and led to the development of the IQ test and the bandying around of terms such as “feeble-minded” and “moron” for those so diagnosed. Of course, these IQ tests had to reach a bar of scientific justifiability in order to be made authentic and put to use but once this was

done “many American social scientists and psychologists began using mental testing”. This attracted the attention of Shaler’s former student, Charles Davenport, who suggested such “mental deficiency” was genetic (and thus should probably be disposed of somehow) and regarded it as a single trait rather than as a score on some imaginary continuum. (Its much easier to want to get rid of it that way.) Thus, from around 1909, it was “believed that hereditary defect was the cause of most law-breaking and that half of all criminals were feeble-minded”, a genetic insufficiency. People were now “born stupid”, something which was both irreversible and made these people worthless. Using a genetic theory of Gregor Mendel (and Mendelian genetics generally) “Vernon Kellogg, a prominent Stanford biologist, claimed that the idea that feeble-mindedness ‘was a unit human trait following the general Mendelian order as regards its mode of inheritance’… is hardly any longer open to doubt’”. Of course, scientists don’t come to such conclusions for no reason and these largely better off, higher status, white scientists didn’t either. Thus, these views:

“*were used to discriminate among individuals and ethnic and racial groups; environmental solutions were left out of the picture. The eugenics movement also used these factors as ammunition for its cause. Many worried that the most ‘valuable individuals and classes’ were being outbred by the least valuable. In 1907, [future] President Woodrow Wilson, who supported the eugenics effort, helped Indiana adopt legislation making sterilization of certain ‘undesirable’ individuals compulsory. More than thirty states adopted such laws.*”

Eugenics was now not just the racist beliefs of some well off white people. It was becoming a matter of political policy as the result of political ambitions to take control of society generally in eugenic terms. Many US states enacted marriage laws (beginning with Connecticut in 1896) “prohibiting anyone who was ‘epileptic, imbecile or feeble-minded’

from marrying. Eugenicists like Davenport found high profile industrialist backers to fund newly incorporated research institutes which would help expand and more widely disseminate their eugenicist beliefs in order that they could present apparently "scientific" research to politicians as the basis of policy proposals. Such people viewed eugenics as a way "to apply science to the problems of a class-ridden and socially heterogenous society". For such people "the other" was a problem and heterogeneity was not welcome. One research centre, for example, the Eugenics Record Office, which had Charles Davenport as its director, "had three main functions: to conduct scientific research on human heredity, to popularize eugenic ideas, and to lobby for eugenics-related legislation." It should be noted at this point that such people and their institutes were not benign. In the years that followed, they began campaigns "to create a superior race", wrote draft laws on which kinds of people ought to be sterilized (mandatorily if they could not be tricked or coerced into agreeing voluntarily) and wished to pursue research into "the value of superior blood and the menace to society of inferior blood".

This leads us up to the "First International Eugenics Congress" which took place in London in 1912. It was an event which Sussman regards as mightily boosting the influence of the eugenics movement thereafter. (This was 21 years before Hitler's rise to power in Germany.) By this time there were a number of places in Europe, in Britain, Scandinavia and Germany, were the negative eugenics had taken hold along with Gobineau's Nordic mythology. In addition, eugenicists worldwide were engaged in similar goals in their various locations and many of the most notable were present at the Congress of around 400 delegates. Winston Churchill was there representing the king of the United Kingdom as was Alfred Proetz, the founder of the German Society for Racial Hygiene, a name which sounds sinister in the extreme in our historical location but which, in 1912, probably had the sheen of scientific respectability about it. Many delegates were distinguished

scientists in their fields or former or future politicians of note. As a measure of the interest and support eugenics was attracting at the time we should note that “in 1912, the current, former, and future U.S. presidents William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson were active supporters of the eugenics movement.” In addition, the Congress was publicised to every American governor of every state and to numerous heads of various professional academic and medical societies in an effort to publicise eugenics to the great and the good as widely as possible. It was presented as the future of respectable science and academic thought.

As an inevitable result of all this, eugenics gained credibility and influence among the white elite. As a measure of this, we may note that eugenics gained the financial backing of the likes of “Andrew Carnegie, Mary W. Harriman, John D. Rockefeller (the oil industry tycoon), Henry Ford, J. H. Kellogg (the cereal magnate), C. J. Gamble (of Proctor and Gamble), J. P. Morgan (of U.S. Steel), and Mrs. H. B. DuPont (of the chemical company)” in the USA. (These are the equivalent of the techbros of their age as they were the rich business people seeking societal influence.) With such backing came recognition and increasing scientific and political legitimacy which was potentially worldwide in scope. And several of the richest people around were prepared to fund it. At the Congress itself the opening remarks to the Congress had hoped that the twentieth century “would be known in the future as the century when the eugenics ideal was accepted as part of the creed of civilization.” One wonders how that speaker would view such hopes now, 114 years later? In 1912 it was felt amongst its proponents that eugenics was “one of the pressing issues of the age”. So around this time eugenics began to rocket through US academia with 376 different institutions offering courses by 1928. Biology textbooks also began to include eugenic thinking as part of their text, resulting in thousands of Americans in the first half of the twentieth century being exposed to eugenics as

orthodox scientific thought. By the 1920s at least 30 countries had eugenics movements. The Congress had been a huge success and by this time eugenics thinking was focused around the following goals:

1. The promotion of selective breeding.
2. The sterilization and castration of the “unfit”.
3. The use of intelligence testing to identify “mentally deficient” individuals and to identify differences in intelligence between racial and ethnic groups (dubbed “racial psychology”).
4. Limiting the immigration of various ethnic and racial groups.

In the years following this first Congress, this agenda was vigorously pursued.

Therefore, the height of eugenics was really the period after the First International Eugenics Congress in 1912 until the end of the Second World War in 1945 - at which point eugenics was swiftly renamed as other things, the stench of Nazism being too much for it to bear. It is, then, for roughly a third of a century (33 years) when eugenics was at its height. But eugenics did not disappear after this, however, and it will often be easily spotted in popular rhetoric and popular policy even today. (Both the recent British PM, Boris Johnson, and his father, Stanley, who has written books on the subject, have argued for mass population control in recent times whilst being appropriately vague on just whose population should be “controlled” and how. They have both fathered at least 6 children as an aside!) At the forefront of this wave of eugenics were the Americans, led by the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), the Eugenics Research Association (ERA), and the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America (ECUSA), the latter of which evolved into the American Eugenics Society (AES) a few years later.

These were all organisations sponsored by plutocrats and business types and they existed both to do research which would make eugenics acceptable on a scientific, classificatory basis as well as in order to publicise eugenics generally. The latter organisation there, ECUSA, existed to “disseminate the eugenics ideal throughout society and thereby alter the course of history”. Eugenics, in relative terms, attracted few in overall numbers but those it did attract were remarkably driven and zealous for their ideals. In 1922 this same organisation had invited potential members to its Advisory Council with a letter urging them to protect America "against indiscriminate immigration, criminal degenerates, and race suicide”, for example. Essentially, such movements were the start of a push to create a master race by weeding out everybody else and so to dominate their respective societies entirely.

Consequently, one focus of eugenics at the height of its powers was selective breeding. As Davenport and his associate Harry H. Laughlin wrote in 1915:

“*Apart from migration, there is only one way to get socially desirable traits into our social life, and that is by reproduction: there is only one way to get them out, by preventing their reproduction by breeding.*”

This led to sterilization policies and marriage bans, although 29 US states already had marriage bans by 1913 which forbade race mixing (some of these bans relied on older, racist thinking such as in the case of Nevada where marriage “between whites and Ethiopian, Malay, Mongolian, or American Indian races” was forbidden – following Blumenbach’s race classifications). Other, eugenics-inspired, laws focused on “public health” by outlawing the marriage of the “feeble-minded” or “epileptic” - as if these were

similar things. (To eugenicists, of course, they were - in that they were regarded as equally undesirable.) Therefore:

"*Improving environment was no longer seen as a possible cure for problems caused by the poor, the criminal, the uneducated, the physically and mentally unhealthy, and the inferior 'races' of the world. From the ERO, trained field workers were sent out throughout the United States to collect anthropometric data and family histories from hospitals, asylums, prisons, charity organizations, schools for the deaf and blind, and institutions for the feeble-minded. The goal was not purely racial; the goal was to identify and put on record the complete family pedigree of any individual or group of individuals Davenport and Laughlin considered to be physically, medically, morally, culturally, or socially inadequate, thus creating a massive underclass of 'unfit' individuals and their families.*"

The ambition of such eugenicists was nothing less than to map and classify society in order to control its population, through breeding, whole and entire. The end goal, necessarily, would then be to "breed out" the undesirable elements. Is this much different from Nazi thinking? You decide. But there is more:

"*Ten groups were targeted as 'socially unfit': (1) the feeble-minded; (2) paupers; (3) alcoholics; (4) criminals, including petty criminals and those jailed for nonpayment of fines; (5) epileptics; (6) the insane; (7) the constitutionally weak; (8) those with specified diseases; (9) the deformed; and (10) the deaf, blind, and mute (with no indication of the severity of these disabilities). The remedies proposed to eliminate this inferior 'germ plasm' included restrictive marriage laws, compulsory birth control, forced segregation, sterilization, and euthanasia, although it was believed that it was too early to implement the last one.*"

Barely 25 years after this was written by Charles Davenport's colleague at the ERO, Harry H. Laughlin, Nazi Germany would be doing exactly such things, unhindered by the political and legal barriers to such actions that American and other eugenicists still had to overcome (such as state and federal politicians and courts, including the Supreme Court). Indeed, it is probably not too hyperbolic to suggest that the only thing that stopped the United States becoming Nazi Germany before Germany did is that Hitler took charge of the political situation in a way that American eugenicists never could (there were, for example, competing civil rights movements in the USA). But the ideas were very much similar and only political opportunity differed between them. Davenport and Laughlin, for example, "believed that stopping the reproduction of the unfit would greatly reduce their numbers within a few generations" and, as in the Spanish Inquisition, thought that "the property of the incarcerated could be acquired and sold to help defer the costs of these programs". So never again should we imagine that Hitler was a one-off, a monster with no history as if formed out of thin air. He was part of a movement, a stream of thought powerful amongst some white minds, a racist myth of Nordic superiority and biological self-importance which was, at a minimum, transatlantic in scope and influence.

As part of this movement the ERO and the ERA (in the shape of Laughlin and the inventor of the telephone, Alexander Graham Bell, an avid and prominent eugenicist on the ERO's board of scientific advisors) tried to get the US Census Bureau to accept and use various eugenics classifications in their work. They mostly refused and so Laughlin switched to mithering people in Congress and state government instead. He hit a home run in Virginia when he found Walter A. Plecker, an enthusiastic racist and eugenicist who was the registrar in Virginia's Bureau of Vital Statistics from 1914 to 1942. It is said of Plecker that "His main interest was to maintain Virginia's racial purity and prevent racially mixed marriages. He wrote to Laughlin in 1928, 'While we are interested in the eugenical

records of our citizens, we are attempting to list only the mixed breeds, who are endeavoring to pass into the white race.'" Thus, Plecker was a purist of sorts wanting to keep "the white race" pure.

Consequently, "Plecker and a few of his white supremacist friends, who called themselves the Anglo-Saxon Club, began to work on new legislation that would ban marriage between whites and any person with even 'one drop' of non-Caucasian blood." The enemy here was what Virginia's leading newspaper at that time, the Richmond Times-Dispatch, called "mongrelism" which, it was thought, "would sound the death knell of the white man." Plecker utilised his whole career attempting to keep white and non-white apart, even going so far as to keep them separate in cemeteries too. Virginia's Racial Integrity Act was passed in March 1924, and falsely registering one's race became a felony, punishable by imprisonment of from one to five years. This law survived for over forty years, until 1966, and Plecker became a hero amongst racists and white supremacists across America, something which helped as he tried to help foist similar laws onto other states in succeeding years. Laughlin, meanwhile hoping to speed up the process, even asked Plecker to prepare a chart for his journal, *Eugenical News*, entitled "Amount of Negro Blood Allowed in Various States for Marriage to Whites". It is said that Plecker "dictated the nature of existence for millions of Americans, the living, the dead and the never born... [He] defined the lives of an entire generation of Virginians — who could live where, who could attend what school and obtain what education, who could marry whom, and even who could rest in peace in what graveyard". A charming guy, I'm sure you won't agree. In such ways, and through such networks of people, was eugenics moulding and attempting to control American society. Only in 1967 were anti-miscegenation laws such as that pioneered in Virginia finally ruled unconstitutional throughout the United States by the Supreme Court.

But there were worse horrors than the anti-mixing and segregation policies eugenicists pursued. One such was the attempt to programmatically sterilize those deemed “unfit” along eugenic lines (i.e. those deemed unfit, either physically, mentally, socially, morally or racially). Sterilization was not a new remedy for various crimes but eugenicists sought to make an ad-hoc remedy more programmatic since they saw in the unfit a biological or genetic deficiency which could not be tutored or otherwise remedied. The eugenic mentality saw the breeding of such people as a threat to the population generally and to a white elite specifically, both in terms of mixing and in terms of overwhelming the rest in simple numerical terms. However, states were hesitant about passing sterilization laws (an example of a problem Hitler and the Nazis would not have) and so eugenicists found progress here slow. By 1922 only some few thousand sterilizations “on inmates of prisons, insane asylums, homes for the epileptic and feeble-minded, and other institutions of social welfare” had been carried out in total, mostly in “liberal” California. Harry Laughlin published his book, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States*, along with sample sterilization laws, to try and stimulate interest but the legal situation was perilous and so it was thought by the eugenicists that they needed to establish its lawfulness in court in order to remove legislative hesitancy. So they sought to fit up a case they could get past the judicial barriers to stimulate greater uptake of sterilization policies.

Virginia was once again the state of choice for this, having passed a law in 1916 allowing the superintendent of the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded, Albert Priddy, to sterilize Colony residents before they were discharged if such operations were approved as safe, effective and court-mandated. Priddy was a staunch eugenicist and began sterilizing women (whom such policies always concentrated on much more than those with male bodies – making them misogynist as well) as soon as the law was passed, aiming to screen out a wide variety of undesirable traits from wider society in doing so,

everything from insanity to promiscuousness (and all of which were assumed to be hereditary). However, Priddy was sloppy (or maybe just blinded by zealotry for his beliefs) and was, in some cases, sterilizing women without a proper court order in each case. So it turned out that a mother and daughter he had sterilized sued him for harms done to them. When the State Court of Appeals did not throw out the case, Priddy was in a bind. He turned to political machinations after being slapped on the wrist by the court who, although finding the sterilizations were illegal, awarded those who had been so sterilized no damages. A new, pro-eugenics, governor of Virginia was sworn in at about this time and, using Laughlin's *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* as a textbook, a new law was passed in 1924. But the eugenicist advocates of Priddy's, and others', sterilizations were still hesitant. Would the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, or even the US Supreme Court, hold up this law as constitutional? They needed to know before they might be hauled up in court once more.

Priddy had sixteen candidates for the sterilizations he was enthusiastic to begin again and he chose an 18 year old woman, Carrie Buck, as the one who would be the test case. It was a set up from the start. The Colony's board voted to sterilize her but, in order to complete the sterilization procedure, the board was required to appoint an attorney to appeal the sterilization order and to defend Ms Buck in the litigation. The person chosen to "defend" her was Irving Whitehead, "a lawyer who was a member of the board of directors of the Virginia colony that had originally appointed Priddy as superintendent" and someone who "had endorsed Priddy's expansive interpretation that Virginia's law authorized the sterilization of inmates". He had even approved the sterilization of the two women the court subsequently found in favour of over Priddy's unlawful sterilizations. He was not on Carrie Buck's side but on the side of those who wanted sterilization to be legal and unchallenged - and was a close friend of Priddy to boot.

Carrie Buck's story is a tragic tale. She was committed to the Colony at 14 and regarded as a "moron" but was taken into a local home where she did chores and went to school. However, at 17, she was found to be pregnant (she claimed to have been raped by a nephew of those she was living with) and was committed back to the Colony in perpetuity as feeble-minded, epileptic or both (diagnoses in such cases were never the most thoroughgoing or the most conscientious). She was, of course, not allowed to keep the baby when it was born and was soon thereafter condemned to sterilization. Now the setup slipped into place. Whitehead was made her lawyer by her legal guardian, the attorney for the Colony, and Harry Laughlin, yes, him again, "provided a long written deposition that relied on IQ test results for Carrie, her mother, and her seven-month-old baby to illustrate that three generations of the Buck family were feeble-minded." She was declared by Laughlin "a potential parent of socially inadequate or defective offspring" in "expert" testimony and the court took less than 5 hours to find the sterilization legal. But it had yet to be tested in the US Supreme Court. Priddy himself died in the meantime.

The chief justice of the Supreme Court in 1927 was Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. He was a social Darwinist and a fan of eugenics and held to the radical views of people such as Harry H. Laughlin and his colleagues. It is said that "He had no compulsion about state-controlled euthanasia of weak and inadequate 'undesirables'". So, unsurprisingly, the court found in favour of sterilization, saying that "the health of a patient and the welfare of society may be promoted in certain cases by the sterilization of mental defectives." Holmes himself said, writing the opinion of the majority in the case, that "it is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let[ting] them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough." As such,

sterilization on eugenic grounds became American law on May 2, 1927, shortly after the Virginia “one drop of blood” marriage laws.

And so:

“*By 1930, thirty states had sterilization laws and approximately 36,000 people had been sterilized, 30,000 of these after 1927. Grounds for sterilization included being judged feeble-minded, insane, medically unacceptable, morally degenerate, and criminal. Some were classed as ‘other’ and others were sterilized for being poor. Just as during the Spanish Inquisition, the trials of these ‘unfit’ individuals were often termed inquisitions, characteristics of guilt were ambiguously defined, and evidence was vague, scanty, and mainly based on hearsay. Property was confiscated and families were ruined.*”

This didn’t only happen in the USA, however. Similar laws were passed in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Iceland and British Columbia (Canada). The German law was virtually identical to Laughlin’s model sterilization law which demonstrates, if nothing else, how interconnected eugenic agendas were across national and continental borders. The Nazis would sterilize around 2 million people against their will before their eventual defeat. Rules on segregation, anti-marriage laws, anti-immigration policies as well as this sterilization policy were all originally American ideas that took place in the USA before the Nazis pushed them even further. As already stated, it was not for lack of will that these things weren’t pushed further in the United States and elsewhere. It was just that they had to go through political and legal procedures that the Nazi seizure of power in Germany overcame in one fell swoop. Even the non-voluntary euthanasia of subjects was suggested in America before the Nazis murdered millions. We will never know if the American political system would have reached such a point had the

Nazi's fanatical attachment to eugenic ideals not got there first and shown the world the horror of its reality.

At the heart of all such horrific behaviour was classification and hierarchical thinking which felt the need to rank and rate people, explicitly comparing one with another. (In the case of the Nazis, this even extended to forcing the targets of Nazi discrimination to wear badges with their labels on, of course, such as the yellow stars bearing the word "Jude" - "Jew".) This was undoubtedly stimulated by, but also reinforcing, classist and racist thinking. A lot of eugenicist activity in the first four decades of the twentieth century generally was taken up with accumulating data about people and measuring things in order to carry out such classificatory and dominating agendas. This, in turn, was used as grist for a narrative mill which spun the old yarns about superior and inferior races and the need for "racial hygiene", to coin the unfortunate German (and very much pre-Nazi era) phrase. Past racists, such as Hume, Kant and especially Gobineau, had been happy to tell racist myths and present them as fact - but they had done no research to establish their narrative entities as realities. It was a passing on of privileged narratives in the hope that the authority of the speaker would carry its own imprint of truth. Yet Gobineau, in his *Essai*, had called for the "scientific measurement" of "racial differences" to begin in order that the classificatory activity establish and set in stone these differences within the very specific "truth" of scientific classification. He wanted his prejudice "mathematically defined", as he put it, in order that it would become both dominating thought and the dominant thought.

Francis Galton, who invented the term "eugenics", was keen to do this and thought that "intelligence" was something that could be given a number and assigned to both individuals and races. Sussman reports that, in doing this, he even rated the intelligence

of some breeds of dog as “higher than that of some Englishmen and most Africans”. Galton was collecting “anthropometric” data from 1884 in London which included “height, weight, arm span, and lung power.” He also invented a number of tests “designed to identify levels of intelligence”. The problem was that they didn’t. “His tests actually measured only physiological reaction time to certain stimuli and did not test mental activity, ability, or reasoning” says Sussman after Stephen Jay Gould. Galton, however, believed “that he was measuring a single, inherited, and unchangeable entity labelled intelligence” and that this was there to find. So, believing this, Galton thought he could label and classify a human being’s, or a race’s, intellectual capacity with a number permanently. He could put you on a shelf or in a file and that was that.

It was the American eugenicists Charles Davenport and his colleague on the ERO’s Board of Scientific Directors, Henry Hubert Goddard, who would run with Galton’s belief that intelligence could be assigned an absolute number by which to classify people. They, of course, also shared Galton’s belief that this was absolutely all down to heredity. They also craved scientific means to measure and designate those they deemed “unfit” as well. Goddard, in fact, had written a book, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeblemindedness*, “in an attempt to illustrate the biological fixity of certain ‘hereditary’ characteristics”. This book would also be printed in Germany under the Nazi regime showing its usefulness to American eugenicists and Nazis alike. Goddard was highly motivated to collect “scientific” data to back up his narrativised beliefs, however, but when he did so it was not using Galton’s tests but those of the Frenchmen Alfred Binet and his student Theodore Simon. These French psychologists, however, did NOT believe intelligence could be assigned a single score and they measured people only for “improving the education of those in need”. Binet, in fact, “believed that intelligence was too complex to be measured by a single score” and it worried him that the scores his

methods provided could be “used as an indelible label, rather than as a guide for identifying children who need help”. But Binet died in 1911 and, thereafter, in utilising his methods, Goddard simply ignored his warnings.

Goddard, in fact, used Binet’s methods to explicitly label, not help, those he so designated. He assumed that “intelligence” was an unchangeable, biologically fixed characteristic in any case. All he wanted was the measurement by which he could label people with theirs. In intelligence testing (what would become “the IQ test”) the American eugenics movement “believed it had a simple measurement that made it possible to identify the mentally and morally ‘unfit’ individuals and races they so intensely wanted to isolate in colonies, castrate, sterilize (and even euthanise), and prevent from immigrating into the United States.” Binet had tested children for educational purposes. The Americans like Goddard and Davenport simply wanted to classify adults and put them, literally, in their place. Their ambition, at least in their belief, was that they could now label everyone. That low intelligence - what they called “feeblemindedness” - was equated with immorality (the stupid are also morally suspect) should then worry us for Goddard himself explicitly believed by the 1920s that around 45% of Americans were “feebleminded” or of the “moron” class. If you were a foreign-born immigrant to the States this became even worse. What Goddard wanted with his measuring activity was to “prove” this.

Goddard himself did testing on people entering the USA via Ellis Island in New York (although technically it is in New Jersey and New York) around the period of the First International Eugenics Congress where he found that decent majorities of various nationalities entering the USA were feebleminded. The proportions went up as the immigrants became more Eastern European (Sussman suggests this is partly a euphemism

for “Jews” whom Goddard found to be 83% feebleminded). As Goddard’s scores for feeblemindedness went up, so did the deportations of such nationalities as a result. Important to note in this activity of Goddard’s is that “to the eugenicists the results of his survey were taken to indicate a spectrum of inherent intellectual worth in the ‘races’ of Europe.” Goddard’s material was not simply used to reject “undesirables”, however. It also passed into a further eugenicist tome which lives in infamy in the history of the movement: Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race*.

Grant was another eugenicist from a wealthy family who seemed to naturally believe in his own superiority. Sussman compares him to the Frenchman Gobineau as a similar kind of man. (Gobineau regarded himself as fake nobility let us not forget.) He was, thus, thoroughly elitist. Grant was neither in favour of democracy nor equal rights, believing both would lead to the end of civilization (or perhaps just his privileges which it would not be hard to believe he regarded as the same thing). He held to the Nordic myth and was a graduate of Yale and Columbia universities. (The number of eugenicists passing through elite American universities, as no doubt was also true of those in other countries, should probably give us cause for concern about the academic elite.) Grant liked animals and was a conservationist friend of President Theodore Roosevelt (who we already know was a eugenics supporter) and he founded both the New York Zoological Society and the Bronx Zoo. He was also friends with Henry Osborn, president of the American Museum of Natural History and a professor at Columbia University. Grant, then, had impeccable social credentials and was one of the foremost natural historians of his day.

However, Grant was also a thoroughgoing racist, one a later commentator has described as a symbol of “open, brutal racism, segregation, and disparagement of persons of color as well as those from alien lands”. He attended exclusive clubs where lectures were given

on “the dangers of the influx of hordes of Jews and other inferior types into America” and how it “posed an evolutionary danger to native Anglo-Saxons via intermarriage and a reversion to more primitive types of humanity through hybridization”. This played into a narrative in which the natural extermination of the white race might be achieved with constant immigration and no measures taken to control the population in general. Grant the conservationist who thought highly of the preservation of animals would not have to do too much thinking to shift these ideas across to what he regarded as his own species, white Anglo-Saxons. In 1894 at least 1.4 million of New York’s then 1.8 million population had at least one foreign parent. (One of these was the famous anarchist Emma Goldman.) New York had more Italians than Rome, more Irish than Dublin and would soon become the biggest Jewish city in the world. It is not hard to see how an elitist like Grant would have considered such facts with anguished concern and perhaps malevolent intent.

When Grant wrote *The Passing of the Great Race* in 1916 he was influenced by well established racists and eugenicists such as Gobineau, Galton and Davenport. Grant’s book, in fact, was the first to mix folk racism such as that of Gobineau with the American eugenics that was becoming increasingly interested in “scientific proof” and measurement generally as a means to label and classify people. The book heavily reintroduced racism as a major focus of the eugenics movement in distinction to the obsession with filtering out the feebleminded of the “lower” classes. Perhaps it is for this reason that, as Sussman informs us, “Hitler considered it his Bible”. Grant became heavily involved in eugenics thereafter, was a close friend of Davenport’s and chaired the Second International Congress of Eugenics himself in 1923 which was held at Osborn’s American Museum of Natural History in New York, a site which now has a statue to the eugenicist president, Theodore Roosevelt, astride a horse, out front on Central Park West.

Grant himself, however, was not a scientist nor a trained medical man. He was, in many respects, a mythologiser as Hume, Kant and Gobineau had been. Thus, whilst giving the appearance of the taxonomic scientist, he was somewhat sloppy. He had three subgroups of human beings, the Caucasians, the Mongoloids, and the Negroids, and he would subdivide these down as well. Caucasians, for example, he would, as Gobineau, divide into the Nordics, the Alpines, and the Mediterraneans. These, of course, each came with valuations and so both racism and classism were baked into Grant's narrative myth in a hybridization (ironically enough!) of Gobineau and Davenport, the latter of which he turned to for "the science bit" to back up the mythological bit he got from Gobineau. The whole was presented as "science", however, and so "The great lesson of the science of race is the immutability of somatological or bodily characters, with which is closely associated the immutability of physical dispositions and impulses" as Grant wrote in *Passing*. So it would be that "Nordics" were scientifically presented as objectively "natural rulers" and "the apex of the development of the white race". I wonder why this book became "Hitler's Bible?" Perhaps it was because Grant denominated Jews a subset of the "lowest" Caucasians, the Mediterraneans, and he depicted them as "swarming" around New York, crowding out more desirable people? Grant was virulently against intermixing of races as a result and wrote that any intermingling always reverted the progeny of such encounters to the lowest common denominator. Racial heritage could not be lifted up by such unions but only dragged down.

The key point in all this is that Grant was mixing an ancient myth that Gobineau had repeated and popularised with the modern pseudo-science of people like Davenport and Laughlin and Goddard. Underneath, of course, it was the same old prejudices, elitism and superiority complexes being played out all over again. But the more "scientific" work was done, the more it could be filtered into books like Grant's and popularised as the results

of scientific endeavour. It co-opted modern science, and a mentality in which science acted as a powerful authority, to present a eugenicist and racist narrative. This must at least go some way to accounting for why successive presidents and prime ministers would be persuaded by its claims although, as I have also amply shown, the elite levels of society, industry and academia, were all infiltrated by such beliefs and, in many respects, it was entirely self-serving for such people on both sides of the Atlantic to give them credence. Who, being at the top of the food chain, does not want to believe that they deserve to be there and that this is about something inherently to do with them and what they materially are? Grant's book, thus, was the perfect mythico-scientific tome to justify just such thinking and to reassure elitist egos.

So it would not be a problem when Grant's book approved of slavery and echoed previous segregation policies. Neither would it be an issue when nationalities, and sometimes not even races, were regarded as "decidedly inferior, physically, mentally, and morally to those who had entered the country in earlier times." Grant regarded it as absolutely necessary for white Americans to segregate the native peoples of the now American land, as well as black people, from the white population and he offered the "scientific" practice of eugenics, including all the policies such a mentality insisted were necessary, as an efficient and rational means to this end. We can see in his text the essential blueprint for what would become Nazism if only some state would actually put into practice the ideas in his book. It was presented as rational, scientific and reasonable. Grant described eugenics in *Passing of the Great Race* as "a practical, merciful, and inevitable solution to the whole problem [that] can be applied to an ever widening circle of social discards, beginning always with the criminal, the diseased, and the insane, and extending gradually to types which may be called weaklings rather than defectives, and perhaps ultimately to worthless racial types." Align this with German, pre-Nazi eugenicist theories of "racial

hygiene" and you have Hitler's programme of racist authoritarianism in a nutshell. *But born in the USA.*

It has, then, been suggested by one writer that what Grant gives birth to in *Passing* is "scientific racism". Such a thing, it is said, involves three basic axioms:

(1) The human species is divided into distinct, hierarchical subspecies and/or races, with the Nordic race at the top of the hierarchy;

(2) intellectual, moral, temperamental, and cultural traits of each race are immutable and correlated to, and inherited with, immutable physical traits, and the genes for these traits are unaffected by the environment;

(3) the mixture of races always results in reversion to the primitive, inferior type, and thus eugenic measures must be taken to prevent the degeneration of the superior race.

Such thinking scientifically founds racism, based in classificatory activities, and mandates authoritarian eugenic policies and activities which are regarded as science in action. Indeed, such thought, according to its wider proponents, including Grant, "purported to employ physical anthropology, Darwinian evolution, and Mendelian genetics to explain why non-Nordic races were biologically inferior." Yet it was not really any different to the Spanish Inquisition in its motivations (or ultimate effects as regards the Nazis and some American practices). Both the Inquisition and the eugenicists come to the conclusion that certain groups of people are inferior, that the characteristics (physical, mental, moral and behavioural) that led to this inferiority are biologically fixed and immutable, and that no alteration of the environment can change these fixed characteristics. As such, people, and

even whole nationalities or “races”, are bagged and tagged, labelled and classified by an oppressing power who wants to control and “eugenicise” the entire population in an entirely arbitrary and authoritarian way. The eugenicists of the early twentieth century thought they now had the scientific know how to do it, too! A “scientific racist” on this model “would point out that a Jew could never become a Nordic” and they thought that made all the difference in the world. Grant’s “scientific racist” book, *Passing of the Great Race*, “became the core of a resurgence of American racism and one of the essential books of Hitlerism”. The latter phenomenon was the pinnacle of scientific racist thought and practice in the twentieth century and involved people which the Americans who funded its racist and eugenic ideas in “bibles” like Grant’s would later want to bring over to their side for the purposes of white American supremacy on the world stage during the Cold War. An example here is “Operation Paperclip”, a secret American program in which more than 1,600 German scientists, engineers, and technicians, such as Wernher von Braun (formerly an SS Sturmbannfuhrer, the equivalent rank of major) and his V-2 rocket team were taken from Germany to the United States, for U.S. government employment, primarily between 1945 and 1959.

But we must now move to summarising what we have learnt from this tale told about European and North Atlantic history over around 500 years, a history still ongoing in white supremacist insurrection attempts on Capitol Hill on January 6" 2021 (incited by the sitting white President and several white members of Congress), the published racist comments of British Prime Ministers and others in an ad-hoc fashion (let alone their racially discriminative policies such as in the Windrush scandal or the Grenfell Tower fire), in labels such as “white trash” and in political projects such as Brexit and others with white supremacist themes, politically organised by men like Steve Bannon and funded by people like billionaires Robert Mercer and Peter Thiel. Eugenics is not at all promoted

today as it was 100 years ago even if its ideas, and the racism and classism which fuel them, are all far too apparent, for example, in policing widely regarded as racist in the United States or in the hold white corporate and plutocratic elites have on the levers of political power more widely. (These, in turn, indicate an intersection of racist, eugenicist and classist beliefs with capitalism, the latter of which thrives on a narrative of division that racism, classism and eugenics provide the opportunity for.)

So racism, eugenics and class warfare have not gone away. They have simply renamed themselves, reorganised, created new targets, are pursued by people with new names and different faces (but a remarkably similar social profile). As Robert Sussman shows in his eleventh chapter of *The Myth of Race*, there is still a network of racist and eugenicist political organisations, journals and periodicals, websites and chat forums, dedicated to policies and beliefs the former racists and eugenicists detailed in this essay would have easily been able to associate with. Some even openly use Nazi insignia and rhetoric as the collective memory fades and such symbols are rehabilitated. Yet today such things are often called “populism” - as if the ability to make things popular was a recommendation in itself and, perhaps, in order to say that people should be given “what they want”. Brexit, funded by people who support racist causes, and politically championed most of all by Nigel Farage, a man whose racist past extends to singing Hitler Youth songs as a schoolboy and whose recent past has been as a fluffer for Donald Trump, is a pertinent modern political example of such an agenda. Living, as I do, in England, I can give my own personal testimony to the fact that, in recent decades, it has become a boiling pot of John Bull racism which touts the eugenicist and avowed racist, Winston Churchill, as its national hero and is vociferous in its opposition to racial justice and defensive in regard to its viciously colonial and classist past. You will still find people in nationalist and white supremacist spaces who think of non-whites as inimical to white society and of equal

rights as things which destroy any chance for a white dominated civilization – something they equate absolutely with civilization itself. “Racial hygiene”, inflected with a base feeling of superiority, very much lives on, as does an innate hatred of human diversity of any kind.

Yet would it now be pertinent to point out that *there is nothing about this racism or eugenics which is “scientific” at all?* Robert Sussman points to the work of Franz Boas, primarily his *Changes in Bodily Form* and *The Mind of Primitive Man*, both published in 1911, just before that first eugenics congress, as volumes which “undermined the ‘science’ of eugenics.” Boas also “developed the scientific, anthropological concept of ‘culture.’ According to this theory, differences among the peoples of the world [a]re the product of their social histories and [a]re determined by an interaction between their social and natural environments over generations.” It does this without “assumptions about the superiority of one group over the other”. What eugenicists, attempting to parrot a scientific authority in their work, did by classifying and hierarchicalising, making one better than another and describing one thing as beneficial and another as detrimental, Boas did in his research by expanding upon a notion of culture as a rich variety of differences which is a naturally occurring diversity. As Sussman explains, “The scientific evidence amassed for Boas’s cultural explanation was much more convincing than the myths that had been passed down through the previous five centuries.” What is, in fact, most lasting about the racist and eugenicist myths of the past 500 years is the simple assumption by white (elite) Europeans (and their descendants) that they *must* be superior - and with argumentation that begins from that point and then attempts to substantiate and support it by contemporary means and to prosecute it in, with and through authoritarian physical actions. *The fact remains, however, despite all this huff and puff, that people cannot be put into biological races and, thereby, be forever distinguished.*

Morals are not a matter of genes. “Feeblemindedness” does not make you a worthless person - the classificatory practices of racists and eugenicists notwithstanding and neither covering up for the insidious valuations their fake science could never substantiate in any case. It was, and remains, a simple attempt at domination by means of designating what the knowledge on the subject is. And knowledge, in certain circumstances, is power.

Thus, as Robert Sussman counsels, “biological determinism is still with us, and all of us who believe in human dignity, freedom, and justice must continue to fight against racial prejudice and those who spread hatred based on the idea that differences among humans exist.” Intelligence, if it is a marker of anything at all (and its only a human concept to begin with!), “is not a unitary, simply measured, genetically-based phenomenon. IQ scores and intelligence are greatly influenced by environment and culture and... there are no biological races among humans and there never have been.”

Yet what does exist is ethnicities and cultures - but these are examples of nature’s diversity and are no grounds for positing eternal, biological differences between people who are imagined to be in utterly different classes because our eyes say they have a different skin tone or live a different lifestyle. And so:

“*Race is not a biological reality among humans; there are no human biological races. What humans have designated as races are based on non-existent differences among peoples. People are more similar to one another biologically and genetically as a whole than they are to any of the classifications that racists have devised.*”

Race is a cultural thing not a biological thing; diversity of human beings is normal and natural and only a danger in the fevered minds of those who imagine themselves utterly

different and then work to fabricate data to support a narrative of supremacy for the purposes of destroying diversity and dominating the body politic whole and entire. Racism, and the eugenic science it gave birth to, are prejudice which is pursued by authoritarian means so that an entirely artificial category of human beings may dominate over the rest. It is itself a culture, in fact, but, in this case, an purposefully manufactured and malignant one. It is a powerful example, in its history, of how unreflective and mythically regurgitated prejudice, when married with classificatory practices, political ambitions and authoritarian means, can bring misery to human existence without any redeeming features whatsoever. It is further an example of how attempted domination never works out well for any except those defined as the group doing the dominating - and that it is not supposed to either.

AN AFTERWORD

The preceding essay was first written in 2021, now five years ago as I type in mid-August 2026. I came back to this essay because of the death of one Jason Arday, a black and autistic Cambridge academic who became the target of a very modern racist and white supremacist network with links to academia, the press, business and politics. Arday, initially, had been accused of plagiarism in an earlier PhD thesis after a known and unashamedly racist academic, Nathan Cofnas, for some reason (and we can only hazard a guess – he says he was tipped off by some concerned person in the university, wink wink) decided to run the thesis through a “plagiarism detector”. (I hope “plagiarism detectors” are more reliable than AI – but I have my doubts.) Having done this, he accused Arday of plagiarism in said thesis. This immediately led (indeed, it was suspiciously fast) to a public feeding frenzy in the UK press (and, who knows, I’m sure on conservative websites and media elsewhere too) which tore Arday to shreds and labelled him, amongst other things,

a “fake”, a “fraud” and a “fabulist”. Indeed, there are websites and publications still doing this to this day as if it is established fact rather than repeated slur. One wonders, however, why some possible plagiarism in one single PhD thesis might require such vitriol – not least when the university to which the thesis was submitted subsequently stated they had found no such plagiarism and regarded it as not being plagiarised – and Arday himself admitted possible administrative mistakes but no attempt to deceive at all.

But there’s more to it than this. There’s always more to it than this. Arday, who was very definitely black, was touted by the racists as a “DEI” hire, a way of belittling the intelligence or credentials of anyone not appropriately white or on the right of the political spectrum. Such people, if they are like Nathan Cofnas, regard black people as INHERENTLY, materially inferior and so not worthy of a place on the professorial staff of an elite university such as Cambridge. Such an attitude can be traced directly back to the attitudes of the racists and eugenicists I discussed in my historical essay above where “not white” means you are somewhere on the sliding scale to moronic stupidity and intellectual and moral unworthiness. Cofnas, and others on his side in the press and elsewhere, have indeed insulted Arday as unintelligent, only in much worse language, ever since the plagiarism accusation was first made. It then becomes increasingly clear, once you start to join the dots of who the accuser was, who they are linked to, which papers and websites jumped on this immediately, who is funding what overly verbose fascist political think tanks and organisations who suddenly have loud opinions about Jason Arday, etc., that what happened to Arday was all part of a racist take down, an attempt to undermine Arday as a way of (in the racists’ mind) undermining the “wokeness” of what they see as a hire that never should have been made in the first place (because black men don’t deserve to be Cambridge professors and it threatens all of the white Cambridge professors, and the culture of which they are a part, if they are). What

they didn't foresee, although I am sure none of the racist agitators care and are probably celebrating, is that Arday might kill himself and so shine an even more powerful light on who might want to bring him down and why. Some people are now doing that and uncovering modern networks of racist cancer that remind me very much of the historical ones I discussed above and which Robert Sussman detailed more fully in *The Myth of Race*.

You see, the cancer was not cut out. It simply hid and mutated, ready to spring out again whenever it had a chance. Jason Arday was its victim this time. Next time, because there will be a next time, it will be someone else. And its not like Jason Arday is its one singular victim in the modern era because, perhaps you may have noticed, in modern America non-white people are being rounded up for sport by a state-instituted fascist militia called ICE and, in the Middle East, the Palestinian people are being systematically eradicated (I believe the correct term for what is happening is a "genocide") with the backing (or at least the bought silence) of the rest of the white-dominated West. The cancer of racism is civilisational (as is the accompanying patriarchy, gender criticism, capitalism, etc.) and the racists will use any tactic to undermine anything that smacks of equality or diversity or inclusion (all ideas they hate) or undermine anyone of any minority whatsoever as part of a cultural war in which they denominate THEMSELVES as the victim (for this diversity is simply crowding them out of what they think they should be solely in charge of).

Who all this benefits of course should be obvious: rich white men like Peter Thiel and Elon Musk, those who have decided their dumb luck in becoming rich (spiced with more than a little nefarious wheeler dealing if not outright theft) means they are superior human beings who should control the world. The primary method of such megalomaniacal madness has always been… division! Sow division and keep on sowing it. That's what they will do. The question for us is are people left who are willing to stand and fight against it?